

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 01594 121016Z

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9548

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 1594

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, CB

SUBJECT: THE PRC AND SIHANOUK: A COOL WINTER

SUMMARY: PEKING APPEARS TO BE LOOSENING ITS CLOSE TIES WITH SIHANOUK AND ATTEMPTING TO INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE KHMER INSURGENTS. THIS CHANGE PRESUMABLY IS BASED ON POWER CALCULATIONS, BUT LEFTIST PRESSURES INSIDE CHINA MAY ALSO BE INVOLVED. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS, PEKING'S TREATMENT OF SIHANOUK HAS SUGGESTED DECLINING ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PRINCE. SINCE
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PAGE 02 HONG K 01594 121016Z

SIHANOUK WENT TO CANTON WITH HIS ENTOURAGE ON NOV. 1, OSTENSIBLY TO CARE FOR THE AILING QUEEN MOTHER, CHINESE MEDIA HAVE

APPEARED LESS AND LESS INCLINED TO PROVIDE THE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF HIS STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES THAT HAS BEEN STANDARD FOR MOST OF HIS FOUR YEAR STAY IN CHINA. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE PERIOD OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEBATE ON CAMBODIAN REPRESENTATION, NCNA HAS CONTENTED ITSELF WITH RATHER SPARSE REPORTING ON CAMBODIA, CONSISTING PRIMARILY OF ITEMS ON COMMUNIST SUCCESSES ON THE BATTLEFIELD. IN REPORTING SIHANOUK'S TET TRIP TO HANOI THIS YEAR, NCNA LIMITED ITSELF TO BRIEF ITEMS ON HIS DEPARTURE AND RETURN TO CANTON--A SHARP CONTRAST WITH THE EFFUSIVE COVERAGE OF THE CHOU-EN-LAI BANQUET AND SPEECHES WHICH FOLLOWED SEVERAL OF THE PRINCE'S TRIPS ABROAD LAST YEAR. FURTHERMORE, THE GENERAL TENOR OF NCNA REPORTING OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS HAS INDICATED THAT THE MAIN ACTION IN THE CAMBODIAN MOVEMENT IS ON THE GROUND, NOT ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT WHICH SIHANOUK DOMINATES.

2. THE CHINESE MAY WELL HAVE LOWERED THEIR ESTIMATE OF SIHANOUK'S VALUE LAST FALL AS IT BECAME INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THE INSURGENTS WOULD NOT ALLOW HIM TO NEGOTIATE A CAMBODIAN SETTLEMENT. THE SUCCESSFUL SOVIET EFFORT TO DEVELOP TIES WITH SIHANOUK BEGINNING IN OCTOBER PROBABLY ALSO PLAYED A ROLE IN THE CHINESE ATTITUDE. IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER THE PRINCE'S WARM RESPONSE TO THE SOVIET INITIATIVE CONTRIBUTED TO CHINESE DISENCHANTMENT OR RESULTED FROM IT, BUT, IN ANY CASE, SINO-SIHANOUK RELATIONS SEEMED TO COOL AT THE TIME THE SOVIETS MOVED TO EMBRACE HIM. A CHINESE DECISION TO LOWER SIHANOUK'S PROFILE OR HIS OWN DESIRE TO DEMONSTRATE SOME INDEPENDENCE FROM THE CHINESE FOR SOVIET AND WORLD CONSUMPTION MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED AS MUCH TO THE LENGTH OF SIHANOUK'S SOJOURN IN CANTON AS THE PARLOUS STATE OF THE QUEEN'S HEALTH.

3. THERE IS ALSO SOME EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT AS THE CHINESE HAVE COME TO RELY LESS ON SIHANOUK TO PROTECT PRC INTERESTS IN ANY SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA, PEKING HAS SOUGHT TO IMPROVE ITS TIES WITH THE KHMER INSURGENTS. WHEN THE REPUTED COMMUNIST WATCHDOG IN PEKING, LENG SARY, DEPARTED FOR CAMBODIA ON NOV. 9, CHOU EN-LAI HOSTED A GALA BANQUET ATTENDED BY SEVERAL OTHER MAJOR COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS--
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PAGE 03 HONG K 01594 121016Z

INCLUDING WANG HUNG-WEN, CHANGCHUN-CHIAO, YAO WEN-YUAN AND LI HSIEN-NIEN--AND MH WAS SEEN OFF AT THE AIRPORT BY YEH CHIEN-YING AND OTHERS. SIHANOUK'S DEPARTURE FOR CANTON THE WEEK BEFORE WENT UNHERALDED AND THE CONTRAST IS ENHANCED BY SIHANOUK'S WELL-PUBLICIZED DISLIKE OF IENG SARY. (IN HIS JAN. 7 INTERVIEW CARRIED IN THE "FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW," SIHANOUK, CLEARLY REFERRING TO IENG SARY, TERMED THE KHMER COMMUNISTS IN PEKING "STALINISTS" WHO HAD KEPT HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE.)

4. THE TURN-OUT IN FORCE OF THE SHANGHAI LEFTISTS FOR IENG SARY (ON THE EVE OF SECRETARY KISSINGER'S MOST RECENT VISIT) RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF LEFTIST PRESSURE TO TIGHTEN RANKS WITH THE INSURGENTS AND TO TURN AWAY FROM SIHANOUK. OTHER POSSIBLE HINTS OF A MORE LEFTIST VIEW INCLUDE SOME REGIONAL BROADCASTS IN DECEMBER WHICH EXHORTED PEOPLE TO STUDY MAO'S MAY 20 STATEMENT IN FULL (THE STATEMENT WAS AN ANTI-U.S. BLAST ISSUED IN 1971 AT THE TIME OF THE U.S. INCURSION INTO CAMBODIA) AND THE MILITANT "THE GUNS ARE STILL ROARING" REFERENCE TO CAMBODIA IN THE JANUARY WORLD DISORDER REPORT (HONG KONG 0712). ALSO NOTABLE WAS A FEB. 5 NCNA CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT NIXON'S LETTER TO LON NOL--THE FIRST NCNA DIRECT CRITICISM OF AN ACTION OF THE PRESIDENT IN A LONG TIME. IN ANY EVENT THE CURRENT MORE IDEOLOGICALLY-ORIENTED STATEMENTS OF PRC FOREIGN POLICY WOULD SEEM TO PROMOTE A CLIMATE IN WHICH SUPPORT OF THE KHMER INSURGENTS IS MORE ACCEPTABLE THAN AN OVERLY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH SIHANOUK.

5. COMMENT: WE DOUBT THAT THE CHINESE HAVE ANY INTENTION TO DUMP SIHANOUK AT THIS POINT BUT THE EVIDENCE DOES SUGGEST A READJUSTMENT OF PEKING'S CLOSE TIES WITH THE PRINCE, AND A GREATER PRC EFFORT TO EXPAND ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE INSURGENTS.
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